

Congressman Baird Responds to President's State of the Union Address (January 23, 2007)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird (WA-03) today released the following statement calling the President's State of the Union Address too little, too late, and too much of what got our country into this position to begin with.

With America standing in decline, unemployment rising, the stock market falling, gas prices soaring, dangerous military conflicts ongoing, global warming and other challenges facing the world, our citizens are looking to the President and the Congress for real solutions, not rhetoric.

Tonight the President had a historic, and his last real opportunity to offer those solutions. In large part, I am afraid he has not met that standard. This is part of a long legacy over the past eight years that has time and time again been driven by a failure to make good decisions and seize positive opportunities and, instead, a recurrent pattern of making bad decisions and taking misguided actions.

Our economic woes today are in large part driven by rising energy prices and irresponsible financial practices.

Rather than a stimulus package that consists largely of giving money away with no plan to pay for it, what we need is a plan that is practical, permanent, paid for and emphasizes personal responsibility. Energy and infrastructure investments meet that standard. Short-term handouts that will be borrowed from foreign nations, spent to buy foreign-made goods and paid for by our children are not a lasting solution.

For my part, I would have hoped the President would have called on our nation to restore economic health and put people to work again by investing in transportation infrastructure and energy conservation. For example, the President should have shown bold leadership by calling on all Americans to cut their energy consumption and carbon generation by 20% in 20 weeks. That would immediately put money into people's pockets through savings on energy and it would have promptly cut energy prices. It would also have shown the world that we are truly serious and willing to take the lead on stopping climate change and ocean acidification.

What the President is proposing for both energy and the stimulus is too little, too late, and too much of what got us here to begin with.

On the education front, the President continues to praise his No Child Left Behind initiative, but he has still not insisted on funding the program as promised in the initial proposal and he said virtually nothing about correcting the most glaring flaws in the program, flaws that anyone who has visited schools, spoken with administrators or met with students and parents would see. We need to correct how yearly assessments deal with special needs and multilingual students, we need to provide support to help teachers meet new qualification standards, we need to allow for computerized adaptive testing, and we should dramatically expand our support for career and technical education. The President has

shown no real initiative or even willingness to deal with these needs. In fact, in most instances his policies have gone in the opposite directions.

½The President is right in his call for Congress to address entitlement spending. I share those concerns. At the same time, it is worth keeping in mind that President Bush presided over the biggest expansion in Medicare spending in decades with no plan to pay for it.

½On the health care front, along with Senator Wyden, I have introduced comprehensive health care reform legislation that would provide personal, private health insurance policies for all Americans while still saving more than a trillion dollars in health care costs in the next decade alone. I hope the Administration and leaders in Congress will consider this legislation and move forward, at long last, with a real, lasting, and affordable solution to our health care woes.

½Finally, on the foreign policy front, I am afraid the President and his Administration do not fully grasp how its actions have adversely impacted our international reputation and standing or the overall security of our nation. For the sake of our security and our economy, we must work vigorously to get our nation back on track and restore our prestige in the eyes of the world. This will take much more than words; we have to see the words put into concrete actions.

½Overall, as I look at what the President has done, as compared to what he has said, and as I look at what has happened to this country since he took office, the sense is deep sadness at the mistakes that have been made and the opportunities that have been missed. I look ahead to next year at this time with hope for change on many fronts.½

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